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ABSTRACT

This project presents the findings of a survey of British Columbia (BC) registrars on the associate degree. Just less than half of colleges and institutes offering the associate degree program collect data on the number of students exiting institutions with a minimum of 60 credits. The number of associate degrees awarded between 1993/94 and 1997/98 has generally increased each year for the system as a whole. However, the number of such credentials awarded by individual institutions varies considerably from year to year. There is no consensus of opinion among registrars as to why students choose to pursue or not to pursue an associate degree. Only two BC postsecondary institutions have conducted formal studies of the associate degree, resulting in disparate conclusions. Students see the degree as improving their employment prospects, although it is not very useful. Roughly 60% of institutions surveyed promoted the associate degree beyond publishing it in their institutional calendars, and do so through a variety of means. There appears to be no correlation between promotion of the credential and the number of credentials awarded. There is no consistent practice of registering students in an associate degree program. The majority of registrars agreed that it was time for an associate degree review and recommended that a number of aspects be given consideration. (VWC)

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Survey of Registrars About the Associate Degree

Report on Findings

October 1998

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Background

In the spring of 1998, the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer distributed a preliminary questionnaire on the Associate Degree to the Registrars of all seventeen British Columbia post-secondary institutions where it is offered. This group was solicited initially as a source of factual information about the Associate Degree: the number of Associate of Arts and Associate of Science Degrees awarded in the last five years; institutional policies and practices on registering and applying for the Associate Degree, and on transcripting of the credential. Council also took this opportunity to ask Registrars their opinion on how the credential is viewed by students attending their respective institutions, including why students choose to pursue or not to pursue the degree. Finally, Registrars were asked their opinion on the need for a review of the Associate Degree, and if in favour, what specific aspects of the Degree should be examined. This survey represents the first step in a broader consultation process involving the academic/instructional units of post-secondary institutions, being undertaken by the BCCAT Associate Degree Review Task Force struck in September 1998.

Summary

The results of the questionnaire indicate that just less than half of colleges and institutes offering the Associate Degree program collect data on the number of students exiting institutions with a minimum of 60 credits, the number of credits required to complete an Associate Degree.

The number of Associate Degrees awarded between 1993/94 and 1997/98, be they Arts or Science, has generally increased each year for the system as whole, however this trend is not a strong one. The number of such credentials awarded by individual institutions varies considerably from year to year. Perhaps surprisingly, this number is not necessarily linked to the size of institution; however, the inability of the smallest colleges to put on a selection of second year courses inhibits students' ability to complete an Associate Degree, particularly in Science.

The responses indicate that there is no consensus of opinion among Registrars as to why students choose to pursue or not to pursue an Associate Degree. However, in one or two areas the majority opinion clusters around specific reasons. For example, the predominant reason selected for why students choose the credential was that they wish an exiting credential, and secondarily, to ease transfer. Beyond that, the reasons cited varied considerably. Registrars gave varying opinions on why students choose not to pursue the credential in general, with no one reason predominating. There was concern expressed by some Registrars (65%) that the Associate of Arts course requirements are too difficult. Factors thought to inhibit pursuit of the Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degrees specifically, covered a wide range.

Only two BC post-secondary institutions have conducted informal studies of the Associate Degree, resulting in disparate conclusions - the first being that students see it as improving their employment prospects, the second being that it is not very useful.

Roughly 60% of institutions surveyed promote the Associate Degree beyond publishing it in their institutional calendars, and do so through a variety of means. There appears to be no correlation between promotion of the credential and the number of credentials awarded, although the three institutions which award the largest number of Associate of Arts Degrees (Capilano, Camosun and Douglas) indicated that they promote the credential in two or three different ways.

There is no consistent practice among post-secondary institutions in BC of registering students in an Associate Degree program. Less than one quarter of institutions notify students they have met the requirements of the credential, however the vast majority require students to formally apply for the degree and all but one makes a formal presentation of the degree at convocation. All institutions identify the credential on their transcripts.

The majority of Registrars agreed it was time for an Associate Degree review and recommended that a number of aspects be given consideration, the one cited the most (by 29%) being the C grade requirement in all courses. Additional comments on the Associate Degree were varied.

Findings

Given that the questions were posed to elicit specific information, the findings are reported here on a question by question basis.

Question 1: How many students exited your institution in each of the years 1993/94 to 1997/98 inclusive, having completed 60 or more university transfer credits?

Of the 17 Registrars consulted, only 8 had relevant data to report. The remaining 9 either left the answer blank or reported that this information was not available.

Of those who provided figures, the numbers varied significantly, ranging from a low of only 3 or 4 students in a given year at North Island College to a high of 724 at Kwantlen University College (as seen in Table 1 below).

Table 1:
Yearly Number of Students Exiting with 60 or more UT Credits

Year	Cam**	Cap	CNC	KUC	NIC	NLC	Selkirk	UCFV	Total
93-94	187	116	154	428	13	34	30	270	**1,232**
94-95	187	113	126	567	4	23	19	361	**1,400**
95-96	187	125	106	546	13	26	16	380	**1,399**
96-97	187	136	107	668	15	30	14	386	**1,543**
97-98*	187	145	n/a	724	3	4	10	n/a	**1,073**
Total	**935**	**635**	**493**	**2,933**	**48**	**117**	**89**	**1,397**	**6,647**

Notes:
* 97-98 figures are preliminary.
** Camosun figures are an estimate to reflect the response that approximately 175 to 200 students exited the institution with a minimum 60 UT credits each year.

Question 2: How many students at your institution received an Associate Degree (Arts or Science) in each of the years 1993-94 through 1997-98?

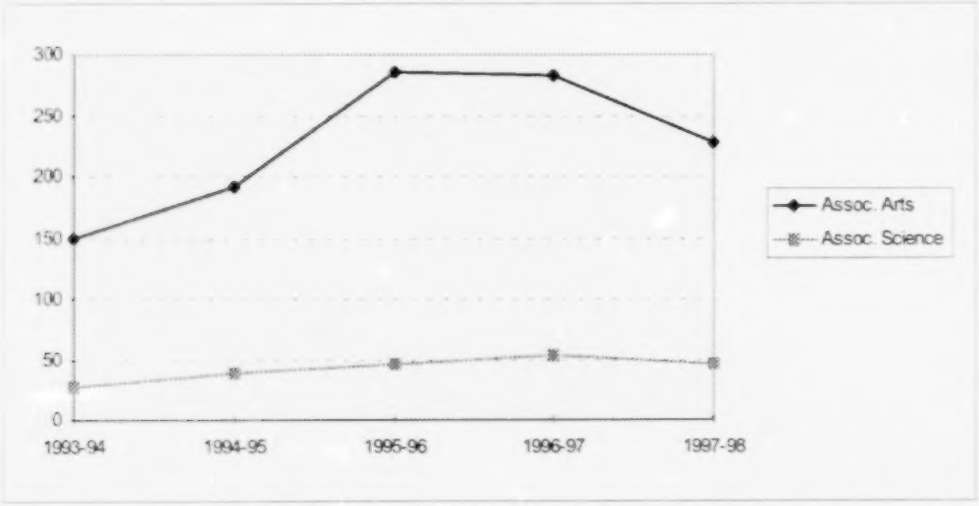
The answers to Question 2 tell us not only how many Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees were awarded by each institution, but also the aggregate numbers awarded in the province. The tables and graphs below indicate not only that the number of degrees awarded each year varies among institutions but also within institutions on a year to year basis. The general trend in the aggregate number of Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees awarded has been to increase each year although the trend is not a strong one. Notice that two fewer Associate of Arts degrees were awarded in 1996-97 over the previous year. Unfortunately, because 1997-98 figures are preliminary and in a few cases were not reported, it is not possible at this time to assess whether last year's numbers have increased significantly over 1996-97.

Table 2 indicates that approximately 1,137 Associate of Arts degrees and 212 Associate of Science degrees were awarded in British Columbia in the past 5 years, totaling 1,349 Associate degrees.

Table 2:
Associate Degrees Awarded by Year & Type - 1993/94 to 1997/98

Year	Assoc. of Arts	Assoc. of Science	Total
1993-94	149	27	**176**
1994-95	192	39	**231**
1995-96	285	46	**331**
1996-97	283	54	**337**
1997-98	228	46	**274**
Total	**1,137**	**212**	**1,349**

Graph 1: Yearly Associate Degrees Awarded by Type - 1993/94 to 1997/98



Graph 1 on the preceding page illustrates the significant difference between the number of Associate of Arts degrees and Associate of Science degrees conferred.

Tables 3 and 4 below and Graphs 2 and 3 (following page) indicate the total number of Associate of Arts degrees and Associate of Science degrees conferred by each institution **in the past 5 years** (in descending order by number of degrees). The highest number of Associate of Arts degrees in this period was awarded by Capilano College (206), followed by Camosun College (160) and then Douglas College (137). The highest number of Associate of Science degrees in the same period was awarded by Capilano College (46) followed by Camosun College (44) and then Okanagan University College (35).

Table 3: Associate of Arts Degrees
5 Yr. Total by Institution
1993/94 to 1997/98

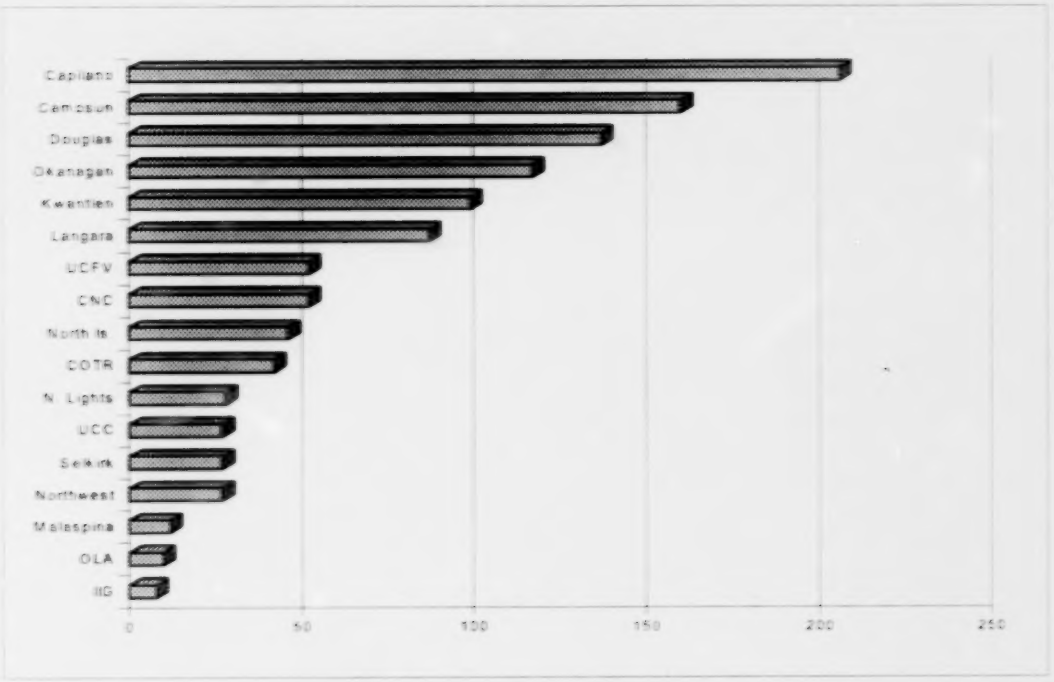
Institution	Total Degrees
Capilano	206
Camosun	160
Douglas	137
Okanagan	117
Kwantlen	99
Langara	87
UCFV	52
CNC	52
North Is.	46
COTR	42
N. Lights	28
UCC	27
Selkirk	27
Northwest	27
Malaspina	12
OLA	10
IIG	8
Total	**1,137**

Table 4: Associate of Science Degrees
5 Yr. Total by Institution
1993/94 to 1997/98

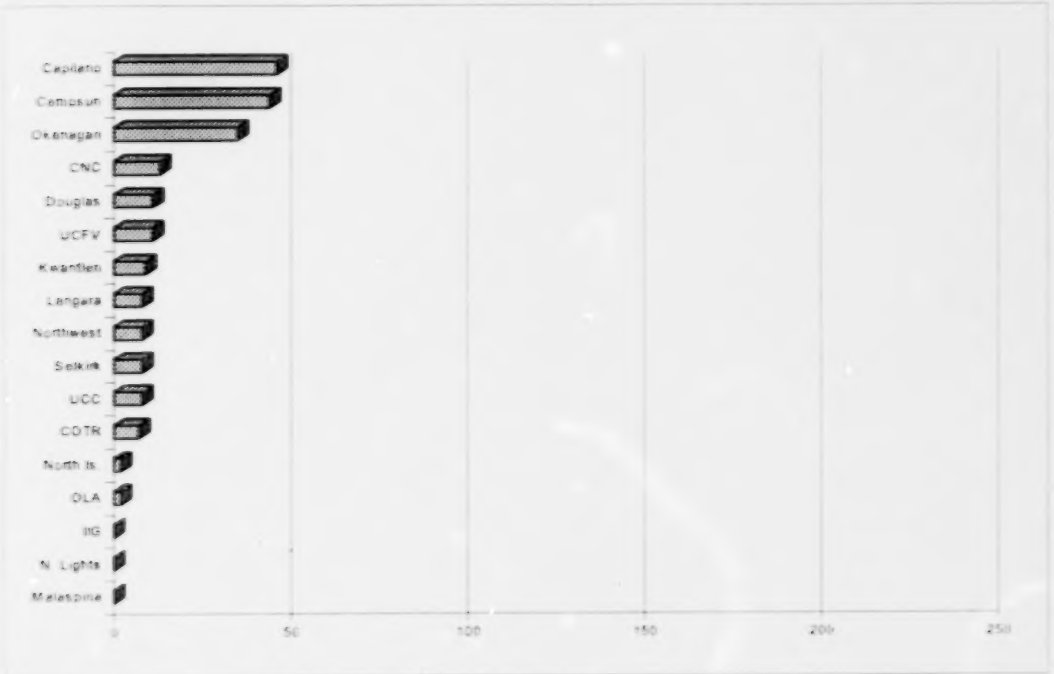
Institution	Total Degrees
Capilano	46
Camosun	44
Okanagan	35
CNC	13
Douglas	11
UCFV	11
Kwantlen	9
Langara	8
Northwest	8
Selkirk	8
UCC	8
COTR	7
N. Island	2
OLA	2
IIG	0
N. Lights	0
Malaspina	0
Total	**212**

Notes:
1997/98 figures are preliminary.
5 Year totals exclude 1997/98 data for Langara.

Graph 2: Associate of Arts Degrees - 5 Yr. Total (1993/94 to 1997/98) by Institution



Graph 3: Associate of Science Degrees - 5 Yr. Total (1993/94 to 1997/98) by Institution



Note that the total number of Associate of Arts degrees conferred in the past 5 years is almost 5 times greater than the number of Associate of Science degrees conferred.

Tables 5 and 6 and Graphs 4 and 5 below illustrate the number and pattern of Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees conferred by each institution in each of the 5 years 1993/94 through 1997/98. Institutions are listed in alphabetical order as the information of particular interest is found in the annual figures which vary considerably from year to year.

The highest number of Associate of Arts degrees **in a given year** was conferred by Camosun College (63 in 1997/98), followed by Capilano College (53 in 1997/98 and 50 in 1995/96) and Douglas College (46 in 1997/98). The highest number of Associate of Science degrees in a given year was conferred by Camosun College (14 in 1996/97) followed by Okanagan University College (13 in 1997/98) and Capilano College (12 in each of 1996/97 and 1997/98). According to the figures provided by Registrars, of the institutions which offer the Associate of Science Degree program, Malaspina University-College conferred no Associate of Science degrees while North Island College and the Open Learning Agency conferred only 2 in 5 years. Neither the Institute of Indigenous Government nor Northern Lights College offer the Associate of Science Degree program.

Table 5: Associate of Arts Degrees Awarded Annually by Institution, 1993/94 to 1997/98

Institution	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	Total
Camosun	0	24	37	36	63	**160**
Capilano	26	38	50	39	53	**206**
CNC	16	13	8	11	4	**52**
COTR	12	8	6	16	n/a	**42**
Douglas	4	8	40	39	46	**137**
IIG	0	0	0	3	5	**8**
Kwantlen	9	22	37	25	6	**99**
Langara	20	18	26	23	n/a	**87**
Malaspina	0	9	1	2	n/a	**12**
North Is.	13	4	13	13	3	**46**
N. Lights	7	3	7	10	1	**28**
Northwest	2	3	12	10	n/a	**27**
Okanagan	21	23	14	23	36	**117**
OLA	0	1	4	4	1	**10**
Selkirk	5	4	6	7	5	**27**
UCC	4	5	8	5	5	**27**
UCFV	10	9	16	17	n/a	**52**
Total	**149**	**192**	**285**	**283**	**228**	**1,137**

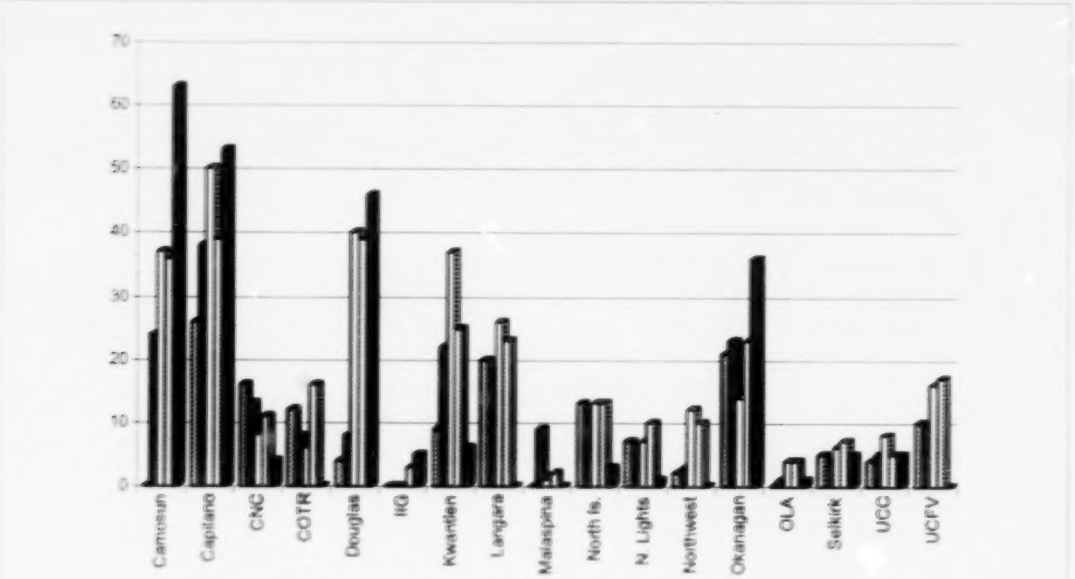
Notes:
1997/98 figures are preliminary.
No 1997/98 figures were provided by COTR, Langara, Malaspina, Northwest or UCFV.

Table 6: Associate of Science Degrees Awarded Annually by Institution, 1993/94 to 1997/98

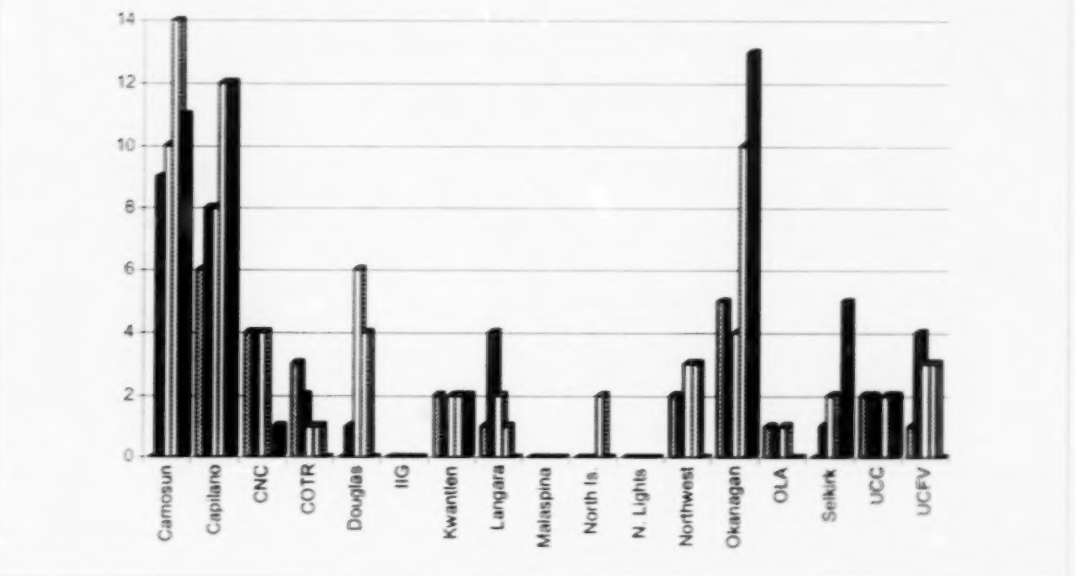
Institution	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	Total
Camosun	0	9	10	14	11	**44**
Capilano	6	8	8	12	12	**46**
CNC	4	4	4	0	1	**13**
COTR	3	2	1	1	n/a	**7**
Douglas	0	1	6	4	0	**11**
IIG	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	**0**
Kwantlen	2	1	2	2	2	**9**
Langara	1	4	2	1	n/a	**8**
Malaspina	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
North Is.	0	0	0	2	n/a	**2**
N. Lights	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	**n/a**
Northwest	2	0	3	3	n/a	**8**
Okanagan	5	3	4	10	13	**35**
OLA	1	0	1	0	0	**2**
Selkirk	0	1	2	0	5	**8**
UCC	2	2	0	2	2	**8**
UCFV	1	4	3	3	n/a	**11**
Total	**27**	**39**	**46**	**54**	**46**	**212**

Notes:
1997/98 figures are preliminary.
IIG and N. Lights do not offer Associate of Science Degrees.
No 1997/98 figures were provided by COTR, Langara, North Is., Northwest or UCFV.

Graph 4: Annual Associate of Arts Degrees by Institution - 1993/94 to 1997/98



Graph 5: Annual Associate of Science Degrees by Institution - 1993/94 to 1997/98



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Question 3: In your professional opinion as a Registrar, why do students choose to complete an Associate Degree?

Registrars were asked to check any of 6 listed reasons why students pursue the Associate degree. Of the reasons offered, the most popular choice (by 12 or 71%) was that students are not continuing and wish for an exiting credential. The second most popular reason cited by 11 Registrars (65%) was in order to ease transfer, the example provided by BCCAT being Simon Fraser University's priority admission policy for Associate Degree holders. UNBC's admission policy was specifically cited by one college Registrar. A reason cited by just less than half of respondents (7 out of 17) was that students choose the Associate degree both to improve their chances for employment and as a worthwhile credential in itself. Just under a third of respondents (5 in all) felt that students choose this credential because their institution promotes it. Only one college Registrar added that students choose the credential because they enjoy the challenge.

Additional reasons cited by Registrars for students choosing the Associate Degree were as follows: some First Nations students will not get funded for a one year certificate program and will therefore choose a 2 year credential; to ease transfer; "students taking other two year diplomas or other programs can easily satisfy the Associate Degree requirements, if it is tangential to their primary objective but seen as being potentially worthwhile"; the Associate Degree is viewed as an interim credential which can lead to a four year undergraduate degree; and the Associate Degree "sounds better than a diploma" and the federal government's work-study program requires that students be enrolled in a 2 year program.

Question 4: In your professional opinion as a Registrar, why do students choose NOT to fulfill the requirements of the Associate of Arts Degree?

It was the opinion of 11 out of 17 Registrars (65%) that students choose not to pursue an Associate of Arts Degree because the **course** requirements are too difficult. Five Registrars (29%) disagreed with this opinion. Of the 11 who felt students believed course requirements were too difficult, 9 (or 53%) felt that the Math/Computer Science/Statistics requirement was too difficult, 5 (29%) cited the Science requirement as being too difficult, and only one expressed the opinion that the English, Math and Science requirements were too difficult. Only one cited the English requirement as being a deterrent, while no one cited the negative impact on GPA as being a concern.

Other reasons cited for students choosing not to pursue the Associate of Arts Degree included: the limited availability of 2nd year courses (cited by 2 small colleges); that students have a different educational goal when they enroll and either complete that program at the initial institution or transfer credits elsewhere (cited by 1 university college); and that students may need courses for the Associate Degree that do not apply to a full degree program (cited by 1 small college). One respondent added the opinion that the degree requirements were too prescriptive.

Question 5: In your professional opinion as a Registrar, why do students choose NOT to fulfill the requirements of the Associate of Science Degree?

Compared to the Associate of Arts Degree, fewer Registrars felt that the **course** requirements of the Associate of Science Degree were too difficult. Less than half of those surveyed (7 out of 17) felt that the Associate of Science Degree course requirements were too difficult, while a similar number (6 or just less than a third) disagreed with this opinion. Four Registrars expressed no opinion on the matter. Of those who felt requirements were too difficult, 3 cited the Calculus requirement as being a deterrent, while 2 saw the English requirement as being a deterrent. One felt that the Arts requirement was a deterrent. As with the Associate of Arts Degree, no Registrar cited the negative impact on GPA as being a concern.

It was the opinion of one Registrar that rather than pursuing an Associate of Science Degree science students tend to either enroll in a four year science degree program or else transfer credits to a degree program elsewhere. Another added that limited course selection decreases the number of Associate of Science Degrees conferred and that for students intending to transfer elsewhere, the fact that some courses required for the Associate of Science Degree are not applicable to a 4 year degree program reduces the number of students who pursue it. A third noted that the local university's Bachelor of Science Degree program with a major in Biology does not require 2 semesters of Calculus, indicating perhaps that science students wishing to avoid Calculus may find that program a more attractive option than the Associate of Science Degree program.

Question 6: In your professional opinion as a Registrar, why do students choose NOT to fulfill the requirements of the Associate Degree in general?

a) Grade requirement

Considering the Associate Degree **in general**, 7 Registrars (just over 40%) felt that the **grade** requirement was too difficult, however, 9 Registrars (53%) disagreed. Of the 7 who expressed concern with the grade requirement, 6 felt that the minimum C grade requirement for every course was too stringent while 4 felt that it was unfair.

b) General requirements

Ten Registrars (just less than 60%) felt that the **general** requirements of the credential were too restrictive, while 5 Registrars (almost 30%) disagreed. Those who felt the general requirements were too restrictive selected more specific reasons from a list of three. Five Registrars (almost 30%) felt that students have a goal in mind and that the Associate Degree requirements don't allow them to meet it. Four Registrars (23%) felt that students want to experiment more and don't want the restrictions of meeting the requirements. Registrars at 3 small colleges said that students can't get all the courses they need to meet the general requirements at their respective institutions, with one of the Registrars adding that 2nd year courses are only available at one of that institution's campuses.

A host of other reasons why the Associate Degree **general** requirements are restrictive were offered as follows: at a small college, Arts students often do not have the required prerequisites for the Math/Computer Science/Statistics courses that are available; "limiting students to 6 first year credits in a given subject area can prevent their fulfilling the language requirement for entry into 3rd year Arts and can restrict choices in first year Arts and Science courses, with the result that students wishing to change from a degree to Associate Degree program might not be able to transfer all course credits, even within the same institution"; the Associate Degree was not recognized within the system or by employers; and most students plan to transfer and want 30 or 60 credits completed in their area of intended degree major.

c) Value of the credential

It was the opinion of almost half (8) of the Registrars surveyed that students don't see the value of the Associate Degree. Seven Registrars disagreed with this opinion. For those who believed the value of the credential was not appreciated, the greatest reason (cited by 7 of the 8) was that it was not viewed by students as a worthwhile credential in itself. Almost as many Registrars (6 of the 8) felt that students did not see the credential as being able to improve their chances for employment. Half of the 8 felt that students didn't see the value of the credential for easing transfer. A small college Registrar went so far as to say that the Associate Degree "is seen as being an non-entity", while another Registrar added the opinion that students did not see the credential as a means to an end.

d) Knowledge of the credential

Almost as many Registrars (6 of 17) felt that students did not know about the Associate Degree as did Registrars who did (7 of 17). Four did not offer an opinion. Of those who felt student knowledge of the credential was limited, two thirds (4 of 6) noted that they really don't promote it. Only two college Registrars added that their respective institutions promote the credential but students don't appear to be interested.

e) Other reasons

A number of other reasons students choose not to fulfill the requirements of the Associate Degree **in general** were offered by Registrars. A small college Registrar stated that the "course requirements for the Associate Degree don't mesh with the courses students need to fulfill their future degree requirements". According to a college respondent, "many students transfer to university before they have completed two years". For another Registrar, the credential "just doesn't seem to have much if any currency in the education or work world". According to a university college Registrar "given that students no longer accept a baccalaureate as sufficient guarantee of future employment, there seems little advantage in pursuing a lesser credential". Further reasons cited by a small college Registrar included the lack of breadth offerings at a small institution, plus the fact that students want a degree in 4 years and the Associate Degree may thwart completing that degree in a timely manner.

Question 7: Have you ever conducted internal studies of students' perceptions, knowledge, or use of the Associate Degree?

Virtually all Registrars surveyed (15) answered that they had not conducted internal studies of the Associate Degree. The only exceptions were at one institute where an informal survey found that students "see the two year Associate Degree as being a better way to gain employment"; and at one university college where "informal discussions indicate[d] students do not see the Associate Degree as being very useful".

Question 8: Does your institution promote or advertise the Associate Degree option to your students/potential students?

Registrars at 7 of the 17 institutions (representing 41%) stated that they limit promotion of the Associate Degree to an entry in their institutional calendar as with all other programs. Ten college Registrars (59%) said that they use additional means to advertise the credential including: a special brochure (cited by 4 colleges); promotion through information sessions, high school visits and/or faculty encouragement (cited by 3 colleges and an institute); posters or signs indicating where more information is available (cited by 2 colleges); program notes (1 college); advising (1 college); inclusion in their "View Book" (1 university college); and by automatically putting students into this track (1 college).

Asked when they began promoting the Associate Degree, 6 Registrars said that they began doing so when the program began. Three said that promotion began in 1994.

Question 9: This question asked in 5 parts about institutional policies and practices on registering and applying for, and transcripting of the Associate Degree.

Nine out of 17 Registrars (53%) answered that their institution allows students to register in an Associate Degree program upon admission, although a small college Registrar qualified this by stating that students register as University Transfer students. Seven Registrars (41%) answered 'No' to this question.

The majority of institutions in the province offering the Associate Degree (13 or 77%) do not notify students that they are close to meeting the requirements of the credential. Of the 4 who do (23%), one institution provides students with a "program plan showing courses completed and still left to do".

Only 5 institutions offering the credential (29%) notify students that they have met the requirements of the Associate Degree.

The majority of institutions (14 or 82%), require students to formally apply for the Associate Degree in order that it be conferred, although of the 2 who do not, one college automatically applies on students' behalf.

All but 1 institution makes a formal presentation of the Associate Degree at graduation ceremonies.

All institutions conferring the Associate Degree identify it on their transcripts.

Question 10: Do you agree that it is time for a review of the Associate Degree?

The vast majority of Registrars surveyed (15 or 88%) agreed that it was time for a review of the Associate Degree. Only two Registrars disagreed. The aspects that were recommended to be included in a review were: the Calculus requirement for the Bachelor of Science Degree; course requirements in general; some course requirements for Arts; the math/science requirement for the Associate of Arts degree; greater flexibility in choosing first year courses; the requirement of a C Grade or better in all courses; harmonizing Associate Degree requirements where possible with requirements for entering third year; discriminatory aspects of the credential; its usability for transfer purposes; its basic premise; and the overall need for the credential when an associate diploma is available.

Question 11: Do you have any other observations or comments you would like to make?

A number of institutional Registrars took the opportunity to make additional comments on the Associate Degree as follows:

"Block transfer to year 3 at any BC university combined with priority admission would enhance the appeal of the degree."

"Perhaps the time has come to consider Associate Degrees in areas other than Arts and Science."

"I wonder if the Associate Degree could be promoted more in the high school as an enticement for those who otherwise would not consider post-secondary academic study."

"Clarify transfer credit to 100 level or 200 level. Some courses transfer to 100 at one institution and 200 at another. If the students can pick which to use, assessing eligibility becomes extremely time consuming. Limit institutional options for creating Associate Degree Majors."

"The Associate Degree is a good credential, a review is timely, it would be more popular with less stringent requirements and more promotion. International students tend to attempt the Associate Degree."

"We should make it clear why one would want one. The breadth of requirements may meet transfer requirements for most university programs, however, it has modest benefit on transfer. It may be best to be an exit credential which has breadth and, by its minimum grade requirement, also shows a certain amount of success in all the requirements. (This implies that a C- grade should not be acceptable)."